

BEWARE OF MICHAEL PEARL'S NO GREATER JOY MINISTRY

Enlarged August 25, 2010 (first published September 5, 2005) (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

Over the past few years a number of people have asked me about Greater Joy Ministries operated by Michael and Debi Pearl, and as I have traveled on preaching trips I have found that many families in good fundamental Baptist churches are using their materials.

The following is a report on my investigation into this ministry. I have read two of Michael's books as well as issues of *No Great Joy* magazine, and I have looked carefully through the material available at their web site.

There is much to praise in Greater Joy Ministries. The Pearl's book *To Train up a Child* contains many very helpful things (though it often goes beyond clear biblical precepts and enters into a legalistic "Pearlosophy," which is presented as dogmatically as the parts that are supported directly by Scripture, such as some of his teaching about education and other things that almost require an Amish-like lifestyle). The Pearls rightly avoid "Christian" psychology. They promote godly husband-wife relationships. They teach parents how to reach the child's heart rather than enforcing mere externals. They focus on how crucial it is for the parents to live what they preach, to avoid hypocrisy. They teach a biblical approach to corporal punishment without apology. They teach parents how to jealously and carefully protect their children from evil influences. They give some excellent and timely warnings about the danger of the average church youth group that throws young people together in a secular fashion and thus allows strong but worldly personalities to corrupt heretofore innocent youth (which is exactly what happened to me as I grew up in a Southern Baptist congregation). They are clear about parental responsibility, that the "buck stops here" with Christian parents in regard to child training.

I am sure that the Pearls are genuine salt-of-the-earth people who try to practice what they preach, but I want to mention some serious errors that those who use their materials should be aware of.

THE ERROR OF EXALTING THE FAMILY BEYOND A SCRIPTURAL BOUND AND RELEGATING THE CHURCH TO A LESSER REALM OF IMPORTANCE

No Greater Joy has some excellent practical teaching on the family, but I do not believe that it is presented within a scriptural balance and framework in regard to the church. In the topics listed at the No Greater Joy web site, "The Church" is glaringly absent. When Michael Pearl speaks about the church it is almost always in a negative context.

While the family is the foundational unit in the church and society and is very, very important, I believe it is possible to turn the family into an idol, when it is emphasized beyond biblical bounds and when it becomes an end unto itself.

I don't believe the Pearls themselves have made an idol of the home, but I believe that many associated with the home schooling movement have, and the Pearls should do more to resist this error. Debi Pearl wisely says: "Do not get caught up in pouring your life into a good cause--even the rearing of a large family. Pour your life into knowing and serving the Savior and desiring that every life you touch be touched with the knowledge of forgiveness in the shed blood of Jesus. We are called to be soldiers in the army of the living God. Raising up young new recruits is exciting" (*To Train up a Child*, fifteenth printing, 2004, p. 119).

The problem is that this is only a brief postscript in their book on child training, and it is not something that seems to be properly emphasized. In the dozens of articles I have read by the Pearls, this is the only time I have seen that type of emphasis. The Pearls have 150,000 on their mailing list and their book *To Train up a Child* has sold more than 400,000 copies. They therefore have a vast influence among home schoolers.

Christ's Great Commission is to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth and to plant churches that are discipleship centers, the pillar and ground of the truth, where believers are trained in the service of God and in the work of world evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:17; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8). This is what we see lived out in the book of Acts and it is a program that is to be perpetuated until Christ returns.

Parents who are committed to Christ will have this Great Commission before them at all times as they raise their children.

To raise wholesome, talented, law-abiding, hard-working citizens is not enough, because it falls short of what Christ commanded.

I believe home schooling is by far the best way to educate children. That is how our own children were educated, but within some home schooling circles there is neglect toward and misunderstanding of the New Testament church.

For example, on my last preaching trip to Australia I met some godly families in one of the churches. The children play various musical instruments; they have a wide variety of interests and talents; they have serious goals in life; they are getting a wonderful education; they are separated from the wicked things of the world. There is nothing wrong with any of this, of course. It is a great blessing to see close and godly families in this wicked age. The problem is with the emphasis and balance. These families do not place the church and the Great Commission in a Scriptural priority. They attend services only once service a week, forsaking the other services for "family time," in direct contradiction to Acts 2:42 and Hebrews 10:25. They brazenly neglected the special services that the church was hosting and thus gained no benefit from the visiting preacher. Their lives could have been challenged by that preaching, but other things were more important to them.

These parents are teaching their children many good things, but they are wrong in teaching them to slight the church.

My friends, the Bible plainly states that it is the church that is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Why doesn't it say that the home is the pillar and ground of the truth? And this is not some vague "universal" church. The context is a scripturally organized assembly that has pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-14). The believer's service to the Lord is to be in and through such a church, in submission to God-ordained pastors and elders (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Any family that is not in proper relationship with and submission to God-ordained church authority is not in the will of God (unless, of course, no such church exists in the area). I say this on the authority of the Scriptures. I would ask such a family, "Who has the rule over you?" If the reply is, "God does," I would rejoin that God Himself says that church elders are to have the rule over us (Heb. 13:17), not as lords over us but as under-shepherds who must, in turn, give account to the Great Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

I understand all too well that pastoral authority has been abused at times and that this is an hour of great compromise in churches, but that is no excuse to reject it. Husbands and fathers have abused their authority at least as much as pastors have abused theirs, but that does not mean that we are free to reject them. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "I will build my church" (Mat. 16:18). It is His plan and program, and it is not to be despised.

There is nothing wrong with a "house church" as such, if that church is scripturally organized, but a loose knit gathering in a home is not necessarily a church, and a father of a family is not a pastor unless he is qualified and called and ordained (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; Acts 14:23).

Paul wrote to Titus and informed him that he was to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). The thing that was wanting, or lacking, was for the new converts to be organized into proper New Testament assemblies, and this required the ordination of qualified, God-called elders (Titus 1:6-16).

This is the pattern that we see in the first missionary journey. After Paul and Barnabas had preached in many places, they returned to each place and organized the new groups of believers into churches and ordained elders in each one (Acts 14:23).

A home Bible study, a home prayer meeting, a loose knit group of home schoolers, is not in itself a proper New Testament church and has no scriptural authority to replace such a church.

If Michael Pearl agrees with us on the importance of the New Testament church, he should be very careful to preach about this, as it is an essential part of "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). He should also speak out plainly against the practice of many today who neglect and discount the value of the house of God (1 Tim. 3:16). We would expect to see such a warning prominently given at his web site, since his ministry is attractive to such people.

Such teaching and warning is lacking, though. In fact, in his article "Sanctuary" (March 2005) he refers sympathetically to "several families" who have "traded church attendance for a DVD player," and he does not explain that this is unscriptural.

Pearl complains that “church today is not a sanctuary from the world nor is it a ‘holy’ place.”

While I agree that too many churches are worldly from top to bottom, meaning that even the leaders and workers are worldly, it is equally true that a scriptural New Testament church will never be completely holy. If a church is reaching the world for Christ as it should, there will always be unsaved and newly saved people in attendance who are not very holy, to say the least. In fact, if we were to be honest with our own hearts, we would admit that there is plenty of unholiness in the most mature of saints, as even the apostle Paul lamented in regard to his own life. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. 7:18). And the apostle John added his Amen to this when he said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:9).

The New Testament church can never be a complete sanctuary from the world or a perfectly holy place for the simple fact that it is made up of sinners who are in the business of reaching sinners. Paul referred to the unsaved who attended the meetings of the church at Corinth, and said nothing to discourage the church from having the unsaved in attendance but rather encouraged them to live in such a way that they would reach the unsaved for Christ (1 Cor. 14:23-25).

A church that is busy reaching the unsaved will not only have the unsaved in attendance at services and events but will have new believers in attendance, as well, and these will be far from “entirely sanctified” and separated from the world.

I remember when I was first saved and joined a fundamental Baptist church in central Florida. I was saved; I knew the Lord; I had truly repented; but I was still a mess! I still had hair down to my shoulders; I still smoked and listened to rock & roll and attended worldly movies. Yet the church members were so patient and kind to me, opening their homes to me, spending time with me, disciplining me; and it was this that helped me to grow and to begin shedding the things of the flesh and the world and putting on Christ.

The man that led me to Jesus Christ had the same attitude. He was not ashamed to spend four or so days traveling with me, living with me, enduring my foul language and disgusting habits and vain arguments against the truth.

The apostolic churches that are described in the New Testament scriptures were far from sinlessly perfect. Consider the seven churches of Asia Minor addressed in Revelation 2-3. Most of these apostolic churches had serious problems. The church at Ephesus had left its first love. The church at Pergamos allowed false teachers in their midst, including the false doctrine of Balaam that was associated with idolatry and fornication. The church at Thyatira allowed a false prophetess to teach worldly heresies. The church at Sardis had a name that it lived but was dead. The church at Laodicea was so lukewarm that Christ warned them that He would spew them out of His mouth.

Consider the apostolic church at Corinth. This church was established by the apostle Paul himself, but it was a genuine mess! The members were carnal and divided (1 Cor. 1-3); they did not discipline even the most glaring sins (1 Cor. 5); they took one another to court (1 Cor. 6); they fellowshiped with

idols (1 Cor. 10); they grossly misused the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14); they allowed false teachers in their midst, even those who preached false christs and gospels (2 Cor. 11:3-4) and denied the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12).

The church at Philippi was an excellent church, but two women in the congregation were so at odds with one another that they had to be corrected by Paul in a public letter (Phil. 4:2).

The apostle Peter played the hypocrite and Paul had to rebuke him publicly (Gal. 2:11-14).

Even Paul and Barnabas had such a “sharp contention” that they could no longer work together (Acts 15:36-40).

None of this is an excuse to think that it does not matter what type of church we attend or how we live, but it is a fact of Christian living and church life that we must understand and learn to deal with.

This is not something that Michael Pearl preaches properly. In his article “Sanctuary” (March 2005) he does advise someone, “Don’t leave the church, anymore than a missionary would leave the field because there are sinners there,” but having read two of his books and dozens of his articles, I am convinced that the message to exchange the church for a DVD player and to look lightly upon one’s responsibility to the church is louder than the message to stay in the church and be a faithful, fruitful member thereof.

For more on this subject see “Seven Keys to Fruitful Church Membership” at <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/sevenkeys.htm>.

THE ERROR OF SINLESS PERFECTIONISM

The most grievous error that I found in No Greater Joy ministries is the heresy of sinless perfectionism or “entire” sanctification. We see this in the article “Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space” from the Jan.-Feb. 2005 issue of *No Greater Joy*.

The doctrine of perfectionism is first of all clear from what Michael Pearl plainly states. He has entitled his teaching “Sin No More” (p. 21).

He says the doctrine of sanctification does not consist of “principles for you to apply” (p. 11), meaning there is nothing to do to achieve sinless sanctification but to understand and accept one’s position in Christ.

He speaks of “the gospel of sanctification” (p. 11) and refers to the gospel of justification through grace as “half of the gospel” (p. 20). Yet the Bible nowhere refers to such a “gospel.” There is only one true gospel and that is gospel of the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:5-9). That one true gospel is defined by Paul as follows: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is the gospel that Paul preached, nothing more and nothing less. Notice that this gospel does not consist of sanctification, though it results in

sanctification. Holiness and godly Christian living is an important doctrine of the New Testament, but it is not the gospel and it is very dangerous to use such terminology.

This reminds us of the Pentecostal “full gospel” or “four square gospel” terminology, which is just as unscriptural. To add anything to the gospel of the grace of Christ, whether it is tongues or healing or holy living or Spirit baptism, is to corrupt the gospel of grace alone by Christ alone through faith alone. Holy Christian living is not the gospel; it follows the gospel (Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 1:27).

Pearl’s heresy of sinless perfectionism is perhaps why he is comfortable preaching in Assemblies of God congregations. He is scheduled to conduct a seminar at the First Assembly of God in Searcy, Arkansas, September 10, 2005.

Michael Pearl actually claims that he is living in sinless sanctification:

“WE SHOULD AND CAN SIN NO MORE! ... I have been preaching AND LIVING this gospel of sanctification for many years. It is not a theory. It is practical, Scriptural reality” (“Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space” *No Greater Joy*, Jan.-Feb. 2005, p. 21).

He says we should and can sin no more and in the same context claims that he has been “living this gospel of sanctification for many years.” The natural meaning of such words is that Michael Pearl has been living in complete, sinless victory for years. If this were true, it would mean that he has continually performed every biblical commandment and duty with a perfect heart.

The advertisement for Pearl’s Bible Study Series entitled “Sin No More” is as follows: “We receive many letters seeking advice. The source of most problems is personal sin, but you already know that. The big question is: ‘So how do I stop sinning?’ ... I assure you, God not only saves his children from the penalty of sin but he saves them from its power as well. YOU CAN STOP SINNING. If you want to know the Bible doctrine of Sanctification by Faith, you will hear THE COMPLETE GOSPEL in this series of messages by Michael Pearl.”

My friends, any believer who would make a claim to be walking in entire sinless sanctification is either deceived or is a deceiver or he has significantly lowered the definition of sin.

Michael also says that his preaching has caused others to live in complete sanctification:

“I preach it in the prisons, and it works on men who have lived lives of total addiction and enslavement. They come unto me all the time, bubbling over with joy, and TELL ME THAT THEY ARE NOW FREE FROM ALL SIN. ... walking in complete victory over sin and self” (“Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space” *No Greater Joy*, Jan.-Feb. 2005, p. 21).

I can say on the authority of the Bible, that this is a deception (1 John 1:8-10).

Pearl’s doctrine of perfectionism is also clear from what he fails to mention. In the aforementioned issue of his magazine he is counseling a mother who wrote to him and described her struggle with sin. In his reply he did not mention any of the following important biblical truths:

There is nothing in Pearl's reply about the indwelling sin nature or the struggle with the flesh that Paul describes so plainly (Rom. 7:18; Gal. 5:16-17).

There is nothing in Pearl's reply about confessing sin and walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:6-10). (In fact, in his booklet "1 John 1:9--The Protestant Confessional," he wrongly believes that this verse is about salvation, that one confesses sin for salvation but that to confess sins after salvation is wrong. The truth is that the context of the first chapter of 1 John plainly refers to "fellowship" and to how we "walk" or live (see 1 John 1:3, 6, 7), rather than to salvation.

There is nothing in Pearl's reply about spiritual growth and progress, that sanctification is not a matter of a one-time experience but of gradual change (2 Pet. 3:18).

There is nothing in Pearl's reply about the fact that the Christian life is described as an active warfare against sin and not merely believing in a position. There was nothing in his reply about yielding (Rom. 6:16), walking in (Gal. 5:16), putting off and putting on (Eph. 4:22-24), putting away (Eph. 4:31), mortifying (Col. 3:5), fleeing (2 Tim. 2:22), laying aside (Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1)

False teaching is often characterized by the neglect of part of the truth, and this is the case here.

My maternal grandmother was a very godly woman, a prayer warrior, a saint who prayed and fasted and saw serious answers to prayer (such as the dramatic conversion of her wayward "hippie" grandson David Cloud in 1973 at age 23). After I had been saved about a year and was struggling with many things in my new Christian life I visited my grandmother and asked her about sin in the believer's life. I said, "Grandma, do you still have any problems with sin in your life?" She was probably the godliest person I knew at that time (that was before I met my wonderful wife!), the person I most looked up to spiritually. She was about 78 years old then, and I was hoping she would reply (as Michael Pearl teaches), "Well, Dave, I used to have some struggles with sin but that is long over, praise God! I am walking in sinlessness!" Instead, she replied: "Dave, I still have struggles with sin every day. I do still sin, though it grieves me and I look forward to that day when I will sin no more."

That elderly saint expressed more solid biblical truth to me that day than you will find in all of Michael Pearl's muddled teaching on sanctification.

I have written to Michael Pearl twice, but he has refused to reply to my questions and concerns. I did not ask for a long drawn out reply. I simply asked, "Do the following statements from your magazine truly reflect your doctrine? Do you live sinlessly?"

A simple "yes" or "no" would have sufficed.

My friends, the error with Michael Pearl's ministry is subtle but I believe it is dangerous.

In the October 2007 edition of *No Greater Joy*, two years after I published my article, Pearl finally addressed my concerns, but in doing so he only proved that he is duplicitous. I was very sad when I

read his reply, because it demonstrated a serious level of dishonesty, and I am pretty sure that dishonesty is not a reflection of sinless living!

First, he was duplicitous in not giving his readers my name and telling them where they could read my report about him. He only identified me as “my accuser.” On the other hand, I gave exact quotes from Pearl’s writings and told my readers where they could check my statements.

Second, he was duplicitous in not telling his readers that I tried to communicate with him personally TWO TIMES and that he refused to answer. I did not ask for a long drawn out reply. I simply asked: “Do the following statements from your magazine truly reflect your doctrine? Do you live sinlessly?” I was trying to make sure that I had not misunderstood the man, but he didn’t have the courtesy to answer me. He could have taken a moment to answer me personally or could have instructed his secretary or someone else to answer me, but he did not. This is a very important fact that he hid from his readers.

Third, he was duplicitous in not telling his readers that I prefaced my report by saying that there is much to praise in Greater Joy Ministries, that they have some excellent practical teaching on the family (I described eight of these in particular), and that “I am sure that the Pearls are genuine salt-of-the-earth people who try to practice what they preach.” Those are not the words of someone who is out to slander a man by taking a cheap shot at him, but that is exactly how Pearl tried to characterize me.

Fourth, he was duplicitous in saying: “I have never said I am sinless.”

In “Living Parallel Lives in the Same Space,” No Greater Joy, Jan.-Feb. 2005, Pearl says: “WE SHOULD AND CAN SIN NO MORE! ... I have been preaching AND LIVING this gospel of sanctification for many years.”

If that is not a statement of sinless living, I don’t know what it is.

Further, in the same article Pearl claims that prisoners that he ministers to “come to me all the time, bubbling over with joy, and tell me that they are now FREE FROM ALL SIN” (p. 21).

If those words don’t mean what they appear to mean, he should admit that he has been sloppy in his published statements and should correct them and thank me for pointing out this matter.

Fifth, he was duplicitous in making the following claim: “I have never used the terms ‘sinless perfection’ or ‘entire sanctification,’ nor have I taught anything that is remotely similar. All one need do is search the web, or a good church history book, to determine the specifics of that heresy in history. The doctrine of sinless perfection is the belief that believers can have a second work of grace whereby the old nature is eradicated, making it impossible for them to sin again. There is nothing in my teaching that is similar in any way.”

I never said that he taught a second work of grace or the eradication of the sin nature, but regardless of what terms he uses, he does teach sinless perfection and I proved this from his own writings. His pretty little smokescreen changes nothing.

Sixth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “Either he has not familiarized himself with my teaching, or he has another agenda that provokes him to deliberately slander my Biblical doctrine. What could prompt a man to attack a ministry on such false premises?”

Here he gives his readers the impression that I am either a careless and ignorant man or a wicked one who is simply out to hurt him. But that I have familiarized myself with his teaching is evident from my article in the quotes I gave from his writings, and to speak the truth about a man is NOT slander. There is nothing slanderous or false about my premise.

Seventh, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “My accuser admits in his diatribe against me that it is the name of the series that led him to conclude that I taught the old Salvation Army doctrine of ‘sinless perfection.’”

I “admit” no such thing. It was his own statements in print that caused me to understand that he teaches a form of sinless perfection, and I quoted those statements. Further, I did not say anything about the Salvation Army doctrine.

Eighth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “My teaching on ceasing to sin is exactly what Baptists and other Bible-believing Christians have taught for 1900 years.”

In fact, his teaching is not exactly what Baptists have taught for 1900 years. I have a large private library on Baptist history and Pearl’s statement is simply ridiculous. There has never been “one standard Baptist doctrine” on sanctification, but most Baptists have not taught that the believer can live a sinless life. We agree that Pearl’s teaching is not new and we never said that it is, but it is heretical.

Ninth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “If my material is read and understood, the only thing you could accuse me of is helping people to stop sinning. So what is the problem? The women whose husbands have ceased pornography or adultery are not complaining about their husbands listening to the series ‘Sin No More.’ ... It is people who are comfortable with the modern belief and practice that we are all slaves to sin and cannot overcome temptations in this life, who are hasty to draw false conclusions about what I teach, simply based on the title of an audio message.”

This makes it sound as if I am opposed to holy living and do not believe in victory over the flesh, which is a lie. My preaching has helped many of God’s people to have victory in Christ. I do not believe that the believer has to be a slave to sin or that he is unable to overcome temptation, but that is not the same as claiming that he can stop sinning and be free from all sin. Pearl is using the old bait and switch tactic here.

THE ERROR THAT JESUS BECAME A SINNER

In the articles entitled “God Made Jesus to Be Sin” and “Imputed Righteousness” Michael Pearl teaches the heresy that Jesus became a sinner. Consider the following statements:

“God was willing to see Jesus as a sinner that He might be permitted to see us as righteousness. Jesus became what we are that we might become what He is. By the imputing act of God, HE BECAME A SINFUL SON OF MAN so we could become sinless sons of God. It was a trade. He traded His righteousness for our sin” (Pearl, “God Made Jesus to be Sin”).

“The God who ‘calleteth those things which be not as though they were’ called His Son something He wasn’t--A SINNER--so that He could call us something we are not--righteous” (Pearl, “God Made Jesus to be Sin”).

“Jesus became what we are, A SINNER--no, more than that, He became sin itself, “...that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” God was willing to see Jesus as a sinner, so He could see us as righteousness. Jesus became what we are, so we can become what he is. HE BECAME A SINFUL SON OF MAN, so we could become sinless sons of God” (Pearl, “Imputed Righteousness”).

It is blessedly true that the Lord Jesus bore man’s sin on the cross and He died to pay the price for our sin, but He was never a sinner and He never became a sinful son of man.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...” Thus, though Jesus was made to be sin in our place, he still knew no sin. When Christ bore our sin, He did not do so by actually becoming a sinner; rather, He bore our sin in that God put that sin to His account and He bled and died to satisfy the Law’s requirement. Likewise, when a sinner puts his faith in Christ God applies Christ’s righteousness to that sinner’s account and declares him righteous. This is the doctrine of justification.

Note the following comments on 2 Corinthians 5:21 which give the sound view of Christ’s atonement:

“He hath made him to be sin; not made him a sinner, but a sin-offering, a sacrifice for sin. Made; that is, ordained a sacrifice to expiate sin, and to bear the punishment due to sinners” (William Burkitt).

“He was made sin; not a sinner, but sin, that is, a sin-offering, a sacrifice for sin” (Matthew Henry).

“A sinner, not in himself, but by imputation of the guilt of all our sins to him” (Geneva Bible).

“... not a sinful person, which would be untrue, and would require in the antithesis ‘righteous men,’ not ‘righteousness’; but ‘sin,’ that is, the representative Sin-bearer (vicariously) of the aggregate sin of all men past, present, and future” (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown).

“... but now that this may appear to be only by imputation, and that none may conclude from hence that he was really and actually a sinner, or in himself so, it is said he was ‘made sin’; he did not become sin, or a sinner, through any sinful act of his own, but through his Father’s act of imputation, to which he agreed” (John Gill).

MICHAEL PEARL’S DUPLICITY

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In an article entitled “A Warning about Michael Pearl’s No Greater Joy Ministry,” first published September 5, 2005, I stated that I had researched Pearl’s ministry because so many people had asked me about it and that after reading two of his books, some issues of his magazine, and looking carefully through his web site, I had a some concerns. One of those pertains to his teaching on sinless Christian living.

Pearl finally replied to one of my warnings, but he does so in a duplicitous manner.

First, he was duplicitous in not giving his readers my name and telling them where they could read my report about him. He only identified me as “my accuser.” On the other hand, I gave exact quotes from Pearl’s writings and told my readers where they could check my statements.

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I never said that he taught a second work of grace or the eradication of the sin nature, but regardless of what terms he uses, he does teach sinless perfection and I proved this from his own writings. His pretty little straw man changes nothing.

Sixth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “Either he has not familiarized himself with my teaching, or he has another agenda that provokes him to deliberately slander my Biblical doctrine. What could prompt a man to attack a ministry on such false premises?”

Here he gives his readers the impression that I am either a careless and ignorant man or a wicked one who is simply out to hurt him. But that I have familiarized myself with his teaching is evident from my article in the quotes I gave from his writings, and to speak the truth about a man is NOT slander. There is nothing slanderous or false about my premise.

Seventh, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “My accuser admits in his diatribe against me that it is the name of the series that led him to conclude that I taught the old Salvation Army doctrine of ‘sinless perfection.’”

I “admit” no such thing. It was his own statements in print that caused me to understand that he teaches a form of sinless perfection, and I quoted those statements. Further, I did not say anything about the Salvation Army doctrine.

Eighth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “My teaching on ceasing to sin is exactly what Baptists and other Bible-believing Christians have taught for 1900 years.”

In fact, his teaching is not exactly what Baptists have taught for 1900 years. I have a large personal library on Baptist history and Pearl’s statement is simply ridiculous. There has never been “one standard Baptist doctrine” on sanctification, but most Baptists have not taught that the believer can live a sinless life. We agree that Pearl’s teaching is not new and we never said that it is, but it is heretical.

Ninth, Pearl was duplicitous in saying: “If my material is read and understood, the only thing you could accuse me of is helping people to stop sinning. So what is the problem? The women whose husbands have ceased pornography or adultery are not complaining about their husbands listening to the series ‘Sin No More.’ ... It is people who are comfortable with the modern belief and practice that we are all slaves to sin and cannot overcome temptations in this life, who are hasty to draw false conclusions about what I teach, simply based on the title of an audio message.”

This makes it sound as if I am opposed to holy living and do not believe in victory over the flesh, which is a lie. My preaching has helped many of God's people to have victory in Christ. I do not believe that the believer has to be a slave to sin or that he is unable to overcome temptation, but that is not the same as claiming that he can stop sinning and be free from all sin. Pearl is using the old bait and switch tactic here.

TESTIMONIES

I conclude with some comments from readers who replied to me after reading the first edition of this article:

"I have just read your article about 'A WARNING ABOUT MICHAEL PEARL'S NO GREATER JOY MINISTRY.' I just wanted to write to you to provide a brief testimony and to further emphasize your warning regarding this subject. Please take full liberty to print this email.

"Approximately a year ago our church had the misfortune of losing at the time a dear member to the 'Sinless Perfectionism' preached by Michael Pearl. He was called to preach and was active in our church and outspoken against sin in people's lives. Unfortunately his love for the Word of God and the Saviour was small in comparison for his love of man and vain doctrines.

"I want to illustrate the importance of folks following the leadership of the local pastor of your local New Testament Church. Our Pastor made every attempt to correct this individual on a number of occasions but the man's heart had been stolen. He might have been saved except for his association with a friend of his from our sponsoring church who was feeding him lies along with the Michael Pearl heresy. He is now part of a cult and took a couple of families with him from our sponsoring church. I agree with you 100% that this is a very dangerous doctrine and exhort anyone who is reading his books to examine the doctrine carefully or to go one step further and just throw them out."

"Thank you for your helpful information regarding the Pearls and their Bible teaching. I am a pastor's wife, and I have received their newsletters for several years and have also recommended their materials to others. I recently stumbled across a website that is hosted by their oldest daughter, Rebekah Pearl Anast, called 'Dreaming Awake.' Although Rebekah uses a penname (Ruby Archuletta, which she says comes from a movie) on the site, she also identifies herself within the site. The website is dedicated to recording her dreams, and she also categorizes them as 'Assignment Dreams,' 'Teaching Dreams,' 'War and Apocalyptic Dreams,' etc. Although I have not seen any that are indecent to read about, they are very bizarre. ... You also pointed out that they tend to be negative about the church. There is another web site which is being started by Rebekah's husband, Gabriel Anast, which he has billed as a 'church' being started on the internet."

"Bro. Cloud, I checked out Rebekah Pearl Anast's website, www.dreaming-awake.com. At the very least, it is bizarre and very misleading. They record dreams that the family has had and they apply them to their lives Biblically just as the dreams that were told of in the Bible. I don't believe God works in dreams to tell his people how they should live or what they should do because we have the

Holy Spirit and the Word for that. Not saying He couldn't if He decides to but I don't believe God uses dreams and visions today. I also checked out the online church that was mentioned, www.7xsunday.net. They don't have the whole site built yet but they do have forums. And, as with any online forum, it is full of confusion and confused people bantering back and forth about 'spiritual' matters. I did not look at every thread but I had looked at enough to tell that, for the most part, people would not be edified or strengthened by this, only bewildered. Thanks for posting the warning. We have subscribed to *No Greater Joy* for a few years and have enjoyed some of the home schooling articles but it has bothered me for quite some time that Michael Pearl's teaching is dangerous and, in some cases, heretical. After examining these other websites, I realized that we can't try to ignore the bad while trying to glean the good because the bad will seep in some way or other. Satan is very clever and he will get to God's people in any subtle way he can."

"Bro Cloud, thank you so much for your work for the Lord. Just a quick testimony about this article. I am in one of your supporting churches. It is a very strong church. Our pastor is great and preaches the Bible. About 5 years ago, the Pearl's materials started circulating in our church. I have to admit that as a mother of five I eagerly read it all, often using their advice on child training. The Bible training CDs made it into the church bookroom and I decided to listen to the study of the book of Romans by Michael Pearl. After listening to it, my husband and I asked the pastor about it because he preached that a husband could have one wife at a time (not husband of one wife) and many other odd teachings that didn't line up with our church or the Bible. The pastor agreed and eventually threw out all the Pearl things. To make a long story short, about 4 or 5 families have since left the church, all having their own excuses, but they have their home Bible studies and other 'Pearl study things.' These families were the type of families that you would think of being strong in the Lord. It was hard for me to see them leave. Since then, most of them have lost their standards, and all are going to different churches, but only on Sunday mornings and getting together Sunday nights for their private Bible studies. One other odd thing. My close friend went to one of his seminars on the teaching of Hebrews. She said that at the end Pearl turned off the taping and preached from the Bible on life before Adam and Eve, that there was another earth and that there is other life out there. And now she is convinced of it. Very weird. Thank you again for your work and your articles."

"What a wonderful and accurate article! I pastor a small church in Nashua, NH, and I have seen numerous of these 'good families' (and I agree with you they are good families that love the Lord and their family) that minimize the local church greatly. The local church is seen as secondary to the family, and yes they do view the family unit as 'the pillar and ground of the truth.' We have lost some families over this, because I do believe the Bible's teaching on the local church and that it is 'the pillar and ground of the truth' and that the Great Commission was given to the Lord's churches."

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